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SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

Security Conditions in China

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SNIE 13-72
10 February 1972
SC 06305-72

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

10 February 1972

SUBJECT: SNIE 13-72: SECURITY CONDITIONS IN CHINA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the likelihood of incidents which would endanger or seriously embarrass President Nixon during his visit to China in late February.

CONCLUSIONS

A. We have no evidence suggesting that President Nixon will be exposed to any danger or embarrassment while in China. We expect physical security to be well organized and effective. We believe the Peking leaders will exert unusual efforts to prevent any embarrassing situations that might mar the visit. The traditional Chinese desire to avoid bringing any humiliation to the nation will serve to reinforce these efforts.

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B. The recent purges in the top military leadership have left residual tensions, and the present leadership situation is not necessarily stable. But we believe that Mao and Chou En-lai will be able to control any potentially disruptive forces during the period of the President's visit.

C. We cannot, of course, exclude the possibility of a violent act by an individual, be he a psychopath, a political extremist, or a hired assassin.

DISCUSSION

1. We have no evidence suggesting that President Nixon (or members of his party) will be exposed to any danger or embarrassment while in China. On the contrary, the available information indicates great concern on the part of the Chinese leadership to forestall any untoward incident. According to clandestine reports, the authorities will not allow persons with questionable backgrounds to join the crowds welcoming the President and may detain some of them under guard. Such restrictions, we are sure, would apply to any foreigners who might be suspect. Indeed, a warning has gone out that during the visit crimes of any sort will be dealt with severely

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"in order to preserve the reputation of the nation." Additionally, no anti-American slogans will be permitted; the authorities will select appropriate slogans and announce them to the people. There has already been an instruction on how to greet the President -- "neither too enthusiastically nor too coldly."

2. To ensure that the situation remains under control throughout, the regime will undoubtedly lay on tight and comprehensive security measures involving the participation of appropriate military, police, and party organizations. While we do not know the precise mix of forces likely to be utilized, we are confident that the security mission will be carried out with considerable skill and great attention to detail. The authorities in Peking have had much experience over the years in controlling large crowds, isolating antagonistic or unstable elements, and maintaining the safety of their own leaders. They are unlikely to permit any laxity on this occasion.

3. In connection with the President's visit, our main concern is the residual tension from the recent purge of China's top military leaders, including Mao's anointed successor, Lin Biao.* The regime may not have had

* The sweep included, in addition to Minister of Defense Lin Biao, at least four of the military's top commanders, all of whom were members of the party's elite politburo -- the chief of staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the commander of the air force, the commissar of the navy, and the logistics chief.

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time, for example, to weed out or neutralize all dissatisfied elements of the military. Nor can we be certain that there are not deep political wounds elsewhere in the government which could lead to a new round of domestic strife in the near future.

4. On the other hand, there is no evidence of any loss of regime control over the armed forces. Chou's long-time associate, Yeh Chien-ying, is now acting as the senior representative of the military. The air force -- which stood down for a full two months this fall -- has been permitted to resume normal flying. Other PLA activities seem to be proceeding at a normal pace with no apparent loss of discipline or responsiveness to authority [REDACTED]. In the country generally, life goes on with surprising serenity, and foreign visitors continue to have relatively free access to many of China's largest cities. On the government level, Chou En-lai projects a relaxed image as he manages a well-coordinated and consistent foreign policy.

5. There is, of course, the question of what role foreign policy conflicts may have played in the recent purge. While there have been

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reports that Peking's agreement to high-level talks with the US caused conflicts within the leadership, preliminary indications suggest to us that leadership concerns were mainly about domestic developments. Even though Peking has been attempting to link the fallen military leaders with the Soviets -- by spreading the story that Lin was fleeing to the Soviet Union when killed in the mysterious plane crash in Mongolia, and by alleging unspecified "illicit relations" with foreign countries -- this seems more an effort to smear the purged leaders than a revelation of basic foreign policy differences.

6. The possibility cannot be ruled out, however, that some military leaders may have seen the approach to the US as unnecessarily provocative to the Soviets and likely to guarantee persistent Soviet hostility toward China. Such leaders, while feeling no sympathy for the Soviets, might have seen this as excessively burdensome to the PLA. They might have felt that some slight political concessions to the USSR could buy more security for China than any amount of maneuvering with its old arch-enemy, the US. There may even have been officers who, remembering when the USSR was the source of the latest military equipment, saw value in restoring something of that earlier relationship.

7. It seems more plausible, however, that there was general agreement in Peking on the need to counter the Soviet threat by improving

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China's ties with the rest of the world, particularly the US. In any case, there is clear evidence of Peking's satisfaction with its moves toward the US so far. Chou has been careful to ascribe these developments to Mao, thereby linking the enormous prestige and authority of Mao to the success of the venture, and muting any lingering opposition.

8. In sum, while Peking has not been able to hide the fact that its leadership has suffered a heavy jolt, Mao and Chou remain in apparent command. And we lean strongly to the belief that they will be able to cope with any potentially disruptive forces in the military leadership. In any event, we are confident that only troops of assured loyalty will be assigned duties connected with the President's security; and it is most unlikely that Chou would route the President's visit into any area about which Peking had doubts. Security in Canton, for example, may be less firm than in Peking and Shanghai. Should the President's airplane have to land at Canton, Chinese authorities might discourage any suggestions for touring the city. As for the Chinese populace, aware of the world-wide audience and instructed on their role, they will offer an orderly and polite reception to the President.

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9. There is the additional possibility, of course, that external elements -- the Chinese Nationalists and the Soviet Union have been suggested -- might seek to disrupt the visit for their own purposes. Without arguing the logic of any such assumption -- the grave political risks involved in discovery would seem to outweigh any potential gain -- it is our view that such missions would have little chance of success. The Chinese Nationalists have attempted to operate clandestinely on the Mainland for over 20 years and have been notably unsuccessful. We doubt that they have the clandestine assets in China to exert any impact on the President's visit -- assuming they were so inclined.

10. A remote but conceivable contingency is that an individual dissident GRC pilot might attempt to intercept the Presidential flight. The chances of success would be practically nil. GRC fighter aircraft have a radius of 500 to 600 miles but even with the full support of the GRC early warning and aircraft vectoring network, the chances of an intercept at ranges of 400 miles south of Taiwan would be marginal.

11. We feel less confident in writing off Soviet assets in China, but we doubt they have much of a capability. In any event, we doubt that the Soviets could affect the visit without showing their hand. In short, neither Moscow nor Taipei seems likely to attempt any such disruption because to be effective it would have to appear to be inspired locally, which we think is beyond their capability for covert action.

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